



# INTERPRETING THE SIGNS

READING JOHN'S GOSPEL

**SESSION 25:  
STAYING CONNECTED TO JESUS  
JOHN 15:1-17**

**BY GEORGE STAGG**

Interpreting the Signs Study Guide: Reading John's Gospel, Session 25  
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Published by:  
Twin Cities Church  
Minneapolis, Minnesota  
[www.tccmn.org](http://www.tccmn.org)  
612-866-5848

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All Bible references and quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

# STAYING CONNECTED TO JESUS

## SESSION 25

### SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. What are the essential components to being a follower of Jesus?
2. How do you make sense of “asking for anything in Jesus’ name” and receiving it?
3. What does it mean to abide in:
  - Jesus’ love
  - Jesus’ words

# PERSONAL STUDY GUIDE

As John’s readers are brought into Jesus’ last hours with his disciples during this Passover supper, we are brought into Jesus’ farewell conversation with those closest to him. This farewell conversation, characterized as Jesus’ efforts to “love them to the end,” consists of Jesus’ words and actions preparing his disciples for a life of service to God without him.

A significant portion of this conversation consists of teachings that enable to disciples to stay connected to Jesus in order to continually grow in him, be cleansed in him, and accomplish his purposes. Let us proceed further into this personal conversation in order for us to follow in the steps of the disciples and learn along with them how to stay connected to Jesus.

## STUDY THE SCRIPTURES

### Read the Passage:

John 15:1-17

### Think Through the Questions:

1. According to Jesus, what must his followers abide in?
2. What must abide in them?
3. What does Jesus expect from those who claim to be followers of him?
4. What actions must be done in order to meet Jesus expectations?

Using the questions, summarize the teaching of the passage.

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## COMMENTARY

To review, Jesus first set the stage by demonstrating extreme humility in service by washing the feet of his disciples, including Judas, who Jesus knew would betray him to death. This humble service was the result of Jesus' confidence in the Father's ultimate authority and power over all things, including his betrayal and coming death. This authority had been given to Jesus. Jesus could proceed knowing that his betrayal and death were not ultimately in the hands of Satan (14:30), but were in accordance with the will of the Father. Jesus knew where he was going (to the Father) and could proceed in confident, humble, and gentle strength without fear, anger, or weakness. Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet provided a metaphor for their task ahead—washing each others' feet, as the life committed to Jesus Christ required the ongoing cleansing from sin, which requires the cooperative efforts of the people of God in service to one another. With the same confidence in the authority of God through Jesus, the disciples could proceed in humble confidence in ministry to God's people.

The rest of the farewell conversation (Chapters 14-16) strengthens the disciples in this task, with attitude and faith that must accompany it. The rest of Chapter 13 and Chapter 14 deepen the disciples in their confidence in the authority and power of God working in them as they seek to love one another in humble service. Several points dominate. **First**, Jesus was going away, to the dismay of the disciples, and the disciples wanted to go with him. Jesus was going to the Father, and while the disciples could not come at this time, Jesus was preparing a place for them to join him later, giving them hope in their eternal state. However, their ability to “join the Father” was not limited to a distant eternal future, but was an experience for them now, which would give them the same hope, strength, confidence, and humility that Jesus possessed. **Second**, this “here and now” experience was possible because of the new order being established as a result of Jesus' going to the Father. The new order was characterized by the “new commandment,” which was to love one another. As John has demonstrated throughout his gospel, Jesus was the fulfillment of Israel and the point of the Jewish Scriptures. Jesus was the new temple (2:13-22), the new sacrificial lamb (1:29), the new prophet over Moses (5:45-46, 6:32-35), the new purification (2:1-12), and the God of Abraham, the father of the Jews. While loving God and neighbor were not “new” in one sense as the Law of Moses required these things, to have a new order characterized by love

and not conditional law was new. This new order was possible because Jesus was going to the Father (14:12) and the works Jesus' disciples would do in this order of love would be greater than Jesus' own works, which were performed under the order of the Law of Moses. **Third**, the Holy Spirit, the Helper (14:16) was being sent by God and would help the disciples in their efforts to do the works of God and love one another. This Holy Spirit, also called the Spirit of Truth, would teach and remind the disciples concerning Jesus' words (14:24-26), which are the words and will of the Father, which Jesus received from Him. Through the Spirit of God, which would dwell among them as a community, and dwell within them as people, Jesus and the Father would actually make their home in them (14:18-23). In this way, eternal life with Jesus and the Father was not a distant future experience, but a here-and-now reality. **Fourth** and finally, life in the new order of love is possible only through belief in Jesus, keeping his words, and through prayer in his name (14:12-14, 22-24). With these things in mind, Jesus continues to instruct his disciples on how to stay connected to him in order to fulfill his words and experience the indwelling of the Father and the Son.

In the continuation of equipping his disciples for their work in the order of brotherly love, Jesus again shows that he is the fulfillment and replacement of Israel—the beginning of a new order. He does this through the metaphor of the vine (vv.1-8). Throughout the Jewish Scriptures, Israel is commonly depicted as a vine. Perhaps one of the most clear passages that not only describes Israel as vine, but also Jesus as a vine is Psalm 80.

7 *Restore us, O God of hosts;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved!*  
8 *You brought a vine out of Egypt;  
you drove out the nations and planted it.*  
9 *You cleared the ground for it;  
it took deep root and filled the land.*  
10 *The mountains were covered with its shade,  
the mighty cedars with its branches.*  
11 *It sent out its branches to the sea  
and its shoots to the River.*  
12 *Why then have you broken down its walls,  
so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?*  
13 *The boar from the forest ravages it,  
and all that move in the field feed on it.*

14 *Turn again, O God of hosts!*  
*Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine,*  
 15 *the stock that your right hand planted,*  
*and for the son whom you made strong for yourself.*  
 16 *They have burned it with fire; they have cut it down;*  
*may they perish at the rebuke of your face!*  
 17 *But let your hand be on the man of your right hand,*  
*the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself!*  
 18 *Then we shall not turn back from you;*  
*give us life, and we will call upon your name!*

It is important to recognize a few things from this passage. First, Israel itself is referred to as a vine that God himself planted (v.8). Second, Jesus (as the son), is also a vine planted by God. As the passage continues, we can see that the Psalmist is calling upon God to help both Israel and the “son whom you made strong for yourself.” Some translations equate “the stock” (which means vine or root), and the “son” of v.15, leaving “and” out of the translation. However, v.17 equates the “man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong” with the “stock of your right hand,” from v.15. From this passage we can see that the vine is both Israel and “the son,” which is Jesus. This is the background to Jesus’ statement in 15:1, “I am the true vine.” This statement reflects Jesus understanding that Israel is only Israel because of him. Without Jesus, Israel is not Israel. It is not the true vine. Again, there is a new order, and its center is Jesus and love, not Israel and the Law of Moses.

Jesus continues the metaphor. As Jesus is the vine, the Father is the vinedresser. The job of the vinedresser is to tend to the grape vine in order to produce as many quality grapes as possible. If left alone a grapevine will grow wild, producing many branches and leaves with very few and very small grapes. The goal is to minimize the wild growth so that the vine uses its energy to produce grapes, not more branches and leaves. Branches that simply grow leaves and more branches without fruit are fruitless branches and must be trimmed off. Those branches that produce fruit must be maintained so that they don’t turn wild and become fruitless. Vinedressers must be vigilant, for if they let the vine go without pruning for even one season, the vine will grow out of control.

Jesus' statements in vv.3-6 make the connection between Jesus and his disciples and the metaphor. Through the word of Jesus, the disciples have believed and been cleansed of their sin. They are connected to Jesus, who is the vine. As connected branches, their ability to produce fruit depends on their connectedness to Jesus. If they are connected to Jesus, they will bear fruit and experience the pruning of the Father. If they fail to abide in Jesus, they are cut off by the Father (not simply pruned) and thrown into the fire. The disciple that abides in Jesus experiences Jesus' abiding in him and through this mutual abiding, produces fruit. The abiding is not unlike the initial belief—both are based upon belief in the words of Jesus. The words of Jesus cleansed them (v.3), and abiding in the words of Jesus produces the fruit of God's works through answered prayer (v.7, 14:12-14). The ultimate goal of the disciple of Jesus is the same as that of Jesus—to do the works of the Father in His authority and power, which exalts the Father and glorifies Him.

As Jesus has experienced the love of the Father, Jesus provides the same experience for those who are his disciples. He loves as he has been loved, which means that disciples share in the love of the Father as well, which again takes us back to the notion of Jesus and Father making their home in those who keep Christ's words (14:22-23). This is exactly what we see in v.10. Those who wish to abide in Jesus' love are those who obey Jesus' commands, just as his obedience to the Father has provided the means through which Jesus has abided in the Father's love. The end result is full and complete joy—the experience of the love and satisfaction of the indwelling Son and Father through the Holy Spirit (v.11). This love completely satisfies. It never disappoints. It is completely sustaining and altogether complete and full. It lacks nothing and provides utter and total contentment through joy.

The commandment then, in getting back to Jesus' initial words from the beginning of this discourse and repeated here, is that they love one another as he has loved them, which was symbolized in Jesus' washing of his disciples feet and will ultimately be demonstrated in his crucifixion. Jesus has led the conversation between these two commands to love one another (13:34, 15:12) with the intent to strengthen them in their ability to fulfill that single command. We have already seen that this involves loving one another in a way that strengthens our walks in Christ through humble service, as seen in the metaphor of the footwashing (13:14). Now Jesus says that we must love one another

as he has loved us, which is exemplified in the laying down of his life for his friends. As Jesus was able to completely lay his life down in the will of the Father, which was fully disclosed to Jesus by his Father, the disciples are able to lay their lives down because Jesus is going to fully disclose himself and his purposes to them. Through Jesus' full disclosure, the disciples can fully invest themselves, not just sit on the sidelines as disinterested slaves who simply do what they're told. Jesus has given them all things to abide in Him and to follow his commands, just as the Father did with him.

The purpose of Jesus' calling of the disciples and fully investing himself in them was so that they would "go and bear fruit." Again using the metaphor of the vine, the fruit is the product of their connection to Jesus and the Father. The fruit are other people that come to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and find life in his name. Not only is this the intent of John's gospel, it is Jesus' intent. This is what Jesus is about, and our prayers should find their focus in this intent. However, fruit is much more than people coming to believe in Jesus. Fruit is also those believers loving each other and abiding in Jesus, showing the world that those believers are disciples of Jesus. This too will lead to belief. These disciples are being called into the mission of Jesus Christ to draw people to believe in him and to mature those believers into disciples through the ministry of prayer and the words of Jesus, which he has fully disclosed to them.

## **THINK THROUGH THE ISSUES**

Just as vine go wild if not continually tended to and pruned, Christians go wild if they do not continually abide and tend their relationship with Jesus. This requires discipline and persevering (abiding) in some important disciplines. Use the questions below to help you deepen in your connection to Jesus.

### **Issue: Connected to Jesus**

1. What does it mean to abide in Jesus' love? For his words to abide in you?
2. According to Jesus, why do we pray? How can we expect our prayers to be answered?
3. How do we know what Jesus' commands are?
4. Why can't the Christian life be lived in isolation?

### **Respond to the Questions Below:**







# **DINNER TABLE DISCUSSION GUIDE**

## **MEAL #1: VINES**

Read John 15:1-6.

1. How must vines be tended? Why?
2. What must the Father do to us?

## **MEAL #2: ABIDING IN JESUS' WORDS**

Read John 15:7-11

1. Why must we abide in Jesus' words?
2. How do we abide in Jesus' words?

## **MEAL #3: ABIDING IN JESUS' LOVE**

Read John 15:7-11

1. Why must we abide in Jesus' love?
2. How do we abide in Jesus' love?

## **MEAL #4: LOVING ONE ANOTHER**

Read John 15:12-17

1. How are we supposed to love one another?
2. What does it mean to lay your life down for someone?

# SERMON NOTES



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